

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President-Elect George W. Bush December 19, 2000

Advice for the President-Elect

Q. What's your best advice——

President Clinton. Get a good team and do what he thinks is right.

National Economy

Q. Mr. President-elect, you've spoken about the economy, about problems with the economy. Are you going to inherit a recession from President Clinton? And President Clinton, what are your thoughts about that?

President-elect Bush. I really don't have any comments. I look forward to talking to the President. I'm so honored that he extended his hospitality to me and my wife yesterday. He didn't need to do this, and I'm most grateful that he would do so.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—what do you think about a recession?

President Clinton. Well, a recession is two quarters in a row of negative growth. I don't think we're going to have that. But we couldn't keep up 5 percent growth a year forever. I think 49 of the 50 blue chip forecasters think that growth will be 2.5 percent or better next year, and that will keep unemployment low. But I think there will be things to be managed. He'll have economic challenges, and you ought to give him a chance to meet them, if not try to figure it all out in advance.

Advice for the President-Elect

Q. Are you going to——

Q. What advice do you have for him, Mr. President?

Q. [*Inaudible*].

President Clinton. My only advice to anybody in this is just to get a good team and do what you think is right.

North Korea

Q. Are you going to North Korea?

President Clinton. No decision has been made on that. We've been talking, our people have, about what we've attempted to do in North Korea. It's interesting, when I had this meeting 8 years ago with the President-elect's father, he told me that the biggest problem that we

were facing was the nuclear program in North Korea. And we were able to build on the work they had done and put an end to that.

And now the big problem there is the missile program. We may have a chance to put an end to it, and if we can, I think we should. But this is something that I want to consult with the President-elect and his team about, and we'll see what the facts are, and I'll try to do what's best for the country.

Q. Governor, I understand that you're not against him going. Is that right?

President-elect Bush. I haven't had a chance to talk to the President yet, Helen [Helen Thomas, Hearst Newspapers].

President Clinton. We've got to talk about this.

Discussion With the President-Elect

Q. What will you tell him is the biggest problem, Mr. President?

President Clinton. I want to talk to him, not you. [*Laughter*] He can talk about that. I waited 8 years to say that. [*Laughter*]

The White House

Q. Governor, how different is it to come to this house in your position now than what it was as a family member?

President-elect Bush. It's vastly different. It's such a huge honor to come as the President-elect. I don't think I'll really fully realize the impact until I swear-in. I suspect the President would say the same thing. I am humbled and honored, and I can't thank the President enough for his hospitality. He didn't need to do this.

Q. Yes, he did. [*Laughter*] It's protocol.

President-elect Bush. I hadn't quite finished yet. [*Laughter*]

Q. Go ahead and finish.

President-elect Bush. And I'm grateful. And I look forward to the discussion. I'm here to listen. And if the President is kind enough to offer some advice, if he is, I will take it in.

Q. Are there questions you have for the President, sir?

President-elect Bush. If there are, I'm going to ask it in private—and afterwards not share them with you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:27 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Statement on the NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting *December 19, 2000*

I am very pleased with the outcome of NATO's foreign ministers meeting in Brussels last week. Secretary Albright and her NATO colleagues reaffirmed the Alliance's commitment to peace, democracy, and respect for human rights throughout southeast Europe. They also reviewed the important progress we have made towards meeting our April 1999 Washington summit commitments—including improving our defense capabilities, increasing efforts against weapons of mass destruction, and reviewing the enlargement process at our next summit, to take place no later than 2002. I applaud the selection of Prague as the site for the next NATO summit. The Czech Republic under President Havel has been a driving force in the continued integration of Europe.

Working closely with the EU, NATO also has advanced the goals we set at the Washington

summit for strengthening European defense capabilities. I welcome the agreement at the EU's Nice summit to improve Europe's ability to act in times of crises and to put arrangements in place for close collaboration with NATO. NATO Defense and Foreign Ministers also acted to establish a strategic partnership with the EU. These efforts will strengthen NATO's European pillar, promote the EU's ability to manage crises where NATO is not engaged, and reinforce our transatlantic ties.

We still have work to do to implement these arrangements and strengthen the habits of co-operation that have been NATO's hallmark since the end of the cold war. The United States looks forward to working with our European allies and partners to enhance our partnership and advance our common goals.

Memorandum of Disapproval for Bankruptcy Reform Legislation *December 19, 2000*

I have withheld my approval of H.R. 2415, the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 2000. I firmly believe that Americans would benefit from bankruptcy reform legislation that would stem abuse of the bankruptcy system by, and encourage responsibility of, debtors and creditors alike. Unfortunately, this bill is not balanced reform and it omits critical language to require accountability and responsibility from those who unlawfully bar access to legal health services. I hope the next Congress can work in a bipartisan spirit to enact balanced legislation.

Over the past several months, my Administration has engaged in a good faith effort to reach agreement with the bill's proponents on a number of outstanding issues. With this goal in mind, we have pursued negotiations notwithstanding my deep concern that the bill failed

to address some creditor abuses and also unnecessarily disadvantaged all debtors to stem abuses by a few.

An agreement was reached in those negotiations on an essential issue—limiting homestead exemptions—with compromises made on both sides. Unfortunately, H.R. 2415 fails to incorporate that agreement, instead reverting to a provision that my Administration has repeatedly said was fundamentally flawed and contrary to the central premise of this legislation: that debtors who truly have the capacity to repay a portion of their debts do so. The agreement would have benefited not only those debtors' creditors but also all other debtors through lower credit costs. In contrast, the current bill's unlimited homestead exemptions allow debtors who own lavish homes to shield their mansions from their